

129 Remarks at the Convention of the National Association of Broadcasters. *March 25, 1969*

Mr. President, all distinguished guests at the head table, Mr. Pace, and all of the distinguished members of this audience:

As you know, I am an added starter today, and I was just saying to Frank Pace that I would not infringe too much on his time, because I know he is your scheduled speaker.

I sometimes have been in the position where somebody else came and infringed on my time, so I understand how this goes.

As I stand before you today, I have spoken in this room many times before, before many distinguished audiences. It isn't just because you are here, but only because it is a matter of fact and a statement of truth that this is without question one of the most powerful groups that I could address in the Nation.

I speak both from an objective standpoint, as I analyze the great influence that your organizations can have on the thinking of the American people, and I speak from a personal standpoint. Certainly I am the world's living expert on what television can do for a candidate, and what it can do to a candidate as well.

Having spoken of television, I don't mean to downgrade radio. We found it a very useful medium in the last campaign. While that is not the purpose of my remarks here today, I can only say that, looking to the future, I can only see growth and excitement in the tremendously interesting ventures in which you are engaged.

It occurred to me that what might be useful for you in brief remarks of this type would be for me to share some of the problems that a President has in attempting to run what we call an open admin-

istration, and in attempting to be candid and honest with regard to the great issues in which you are vitally interested.

I think if we were to pick one issue of all the others that the American people have an interest in, it is Vietnam. On that issue, on television, on radio, and in the newspapers, day after day, we hear speculation. We read it, about what is happening in Vietnam, what is happening on the battlefield, but more important, what is happening at the negotiating tables.

I want you to know what my belief is about the conduct of this war, about the negotiations, and about the prospects. What I say will not give you, perhaps, as much hope as you might like to hear. But what I say, I believe, is in the best interests of the result, and the result is ending the war on a basis that will promote real peace in the Pacific.

I could stand before you today and talk rather optimistically about the prospect of bringing boys home from Vietnam at a time when a Communist offensive is at a high peak. I can tell you that it will be the objective of this administration to bring men home from Vietnam just as soon as the military situation, the diplomatic situation, and the training of the South Vietnamese forces will enable us to do so.

But I can also tell you that I think it is not in the interests of the Nation for the President of the United States to stand before any audience and to raise hopes and then disappoint them. So I will only tell you today what our objective is.

I will tell you, looking toward the future, I think we are going to achieve

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propriate on our part—but I can only say that if we are to make progress in private talks they must be private.

Therefore, to disclose when and where and what and how in any degree would not serve the interests of peace. Now, again, I realize that it would raise hopes. It would make a good headline, and a good first 2 minutes on the evening show, if I were to indicate that we were proceeding in private talks or what was going on.

But let me say that that would not serve the long-range interests of bringing peace. I can only assure you that there is no objective of this administration that is higher—and let me say this was also true of the other administration, but we are proceeding in different ways—than to bring this war to a conclusion at the earliest possible time in a manner that will promote real peace.

We think we are on the right track but we are not going to raise false hopes. We are not going to tell you what is going on in private talks. What we are going to do is to do our job and then a few months from now, I think you will look back and say we did what was right. If we did what was wrong then it doesn't make any difference, the headline that we have made today. So, this will be our policy in that respect.

Again, I think that you as negotiators will recognize the validity of that position. Much as we want an open administration, there are times when it is necessary to have those quiet conversations without publicity in which each side can explore the areas of difference and eventually reach an agreement which then, of course, publicly will be announced.

If Frank Pace will indulge me just a little longer, I understand there has been some interest in the ABM Safeguard sys-

tem which I have talked about. I am not here to twist your arms or to attempt to influence you one way or another. All of you, as far as that system, the defense of the country, in all of these matters, must examine the evidence and then make your own decisions with regard to what is in the best interests of the Nation.

But I would like to share with you briefly the considerations that went into that decision—not an easy decision. In fact, the easy decision would have been not to make it. The easy decision would have been to put it off, to have research and development, or to indicate that there was no significant threat, or that it wouldn't work, or that it really didn't matter.

But I can tell you that these were the factors that we were confronted with and which we had to deal with, and which made it necessary for us to announce a hard decision rather than an easy one. We hope it is the right one. We think it is. That is for you to judge. It is for the American people to appraise.

I found when I came to office that in 1962, when the Cuban confrontation occurred, that the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union was approximately four or five to one in our favor. Because of that balance of power in our favor, the President of the United States in a very courageous decision was able to act in the best interests of the United States and avoid a missile installation 90 miles from our shore.

If the United States had not had that kind of assurance—not only the assurance of our power but also a recognition that those who threatened our security at that time, the Soviet Union, had a recognition on their part that we had that kind of strength—if that had not been the case

that decision might not have been made or it would have been much more dangerous to make.

Now, what has happened from 1962 to 1969? Since that time the Soviet Union has widened the gap in conventional weapons which they have always had in Western Europe. They have rapidly closed the gap in naval strength, particularly in the Mediterranean, and they have substantially closed the gap in strategic weapons. So, we look at that situation today. And in describing it, let me lay to rest one point of view that I saw expressed in some reaction to Secretary Laird's testimony. In describing this, this is no cause for fright.

The United States is still infinitely strong and powerful. We are still able to meet any potential threat. But the problem that the President of the United States faces as the Commander in Chief and as the one who has the responsibility to see that our defenses are adequate to make peaceful diplomacy possible, the responsibility that he has is to examine not only what the situation is now but what it will be 4 or 5 years from now. And the decision that I made here and the decisions I will be making on all defense matters, I can assure you, will have one consideration only.

I do not believe that the United States should threaten any other nation. We are not interested in aggression. I do believe, however, that without the power of the United States the great hundreds of millions of people who live in the free world would not have had the assurance of freedom that they have had. In other words, it is the power of the United States that has avoided a world war and a world confrontation.

And whether it is in my administration

or in the next, I never want the President of the United States, when he sits down at a conference table, to be in a second-rate position as far as the strength of the United States is concerned. [*Applause*]

I am not suggesting that that means we embark on an arms race. I am not suggesting that that means that we go forward in order to regain the four or five to one superiority that we once had. That will not happen. But I am suggesting that when we look at those facts, there are some limited actions that the United States, I think, should take.

One involves the ABM Safeguard system. What this system will do, first, is to provide some protection for our deterrent capability, our Minuteman sites. That means our second strike capability. This was necessary because we found that the Soviet Union had developed new weapons with greater accuracy, the SS9, that could take out our hardened Minuteman sites, and thereby reduce the credibility of our second strike capability.

The credibility of the American second strike is essential, diplomatically and also in the long range as far as preserving peace in the world. In addition to that, the ABM Safeguard system provides an area defense of the entire United States for any attack by the Chinese Communists within the next 10 years, or any other nuclear power which might acquire such weapons in that period.

Let me emphasize what Safeguard does not do. There is no way at this time that we can safeguard all of the American people through antiballistic missiles against an attack by a sophisticated major nuclear power like the Soviet Union. But we can increase the credibility of our second strike force by defending our Minuteman sites.

On the other hand, when we look at a